

What Are the Great Racehorse Stories and Why

By **GERALD BEAUMONT**,
Author of "Riders Up."

I ASKED a celebrated sportsman the other day the same question that is given at the head of this article, and his reply was: "Well, I'll bite; what are they?" Whereupon I was tempted to change the wording so as to read: "Where are the great racehorse stories and why not?"

Judging by the volume of "past performances" as represented by the Encyclopedia of the World's Best Literature, if any writer of racing fiction ever attained the classic halls of immortality he must have sneaked in through the back door when the judges were not looking. Nowhere in Dr. Eliot five foot book shelf do we find a Poe of the paddock, a Shakespeare of the saddle, a Thackeray of the thoroughbred! Apparently the great minds of literature have found highest expression when dealing with human emotions and human endeavors. Man has concerned himself largely with Man.

However, let the lover of King Horse take heart. Picking winners is a difficult task at its best, and I make no claim to being an experienced literary "tout," but these things seem to me to be true:

First—The racetrack is a modern institution and we must look to modern writers for its best interpretation.

Second—Ever since man learned the art of expression he has been striving inadequately to express his admiration for the thoroughbred.

Third—The greatest racehorse stories have been enacted rather than written. The romance and glory of the horse belongs to fact rather than fiction.

Taking up the first point, I would recommend to those interested in the subject the volume on racing by the Earl of Suffolk and Berkshire and W. G. Craven from the Badminton Library. Then "Fifty Years of Racing in America," by W. S. Vosburg, published by the New York Jockey Club. And a third volume—"The Autobiography of a Racehorse," by L. B. Yates (Doran). These three books give a comprehensive and accurate account of the development of the sport of kings in England and America.

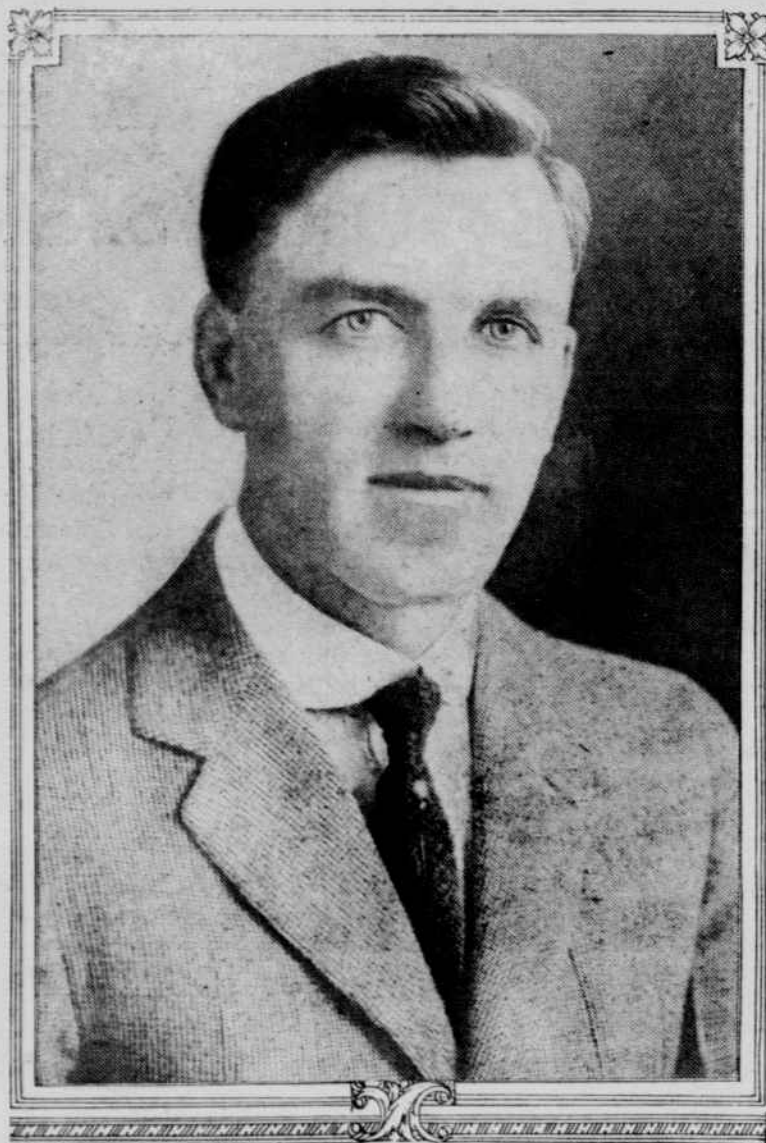
The lover of racing fiction will find humor and graphic pen pictures in the race-track stories of the late Charles E. Van Loan, particularly the volume concerning Ol' Man Curry, the bewhiskered patriarch of the "bush" tracks, who mixed his chewing tobacco with philosophy and named his horses after characters in the Bible. For sentiment and thrills I recommend John Taintor Foote's racing stories, particularly the well known "Look of an Eagle."

There are other writers, among them W. S. Fraser and Jonathan Brooks, who are delighting present day magazine readers.

The list seems small, indeed, but I can add to it only two more choice selections. "Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur! . . . Speed thee, Jew! . . . Take the wall now! On! Loose the Arabs! . . . Give them rein and scourge! Let him not have the turn on thee again! . . . Now or never! . . ."

There you have it! As good a description of the human elements involved in a horse race as was ever given. Gen. Lew Wallace's "Ben-Hur," if only for the chariot race, belongs in the library of every sportsman.

The other volume I would recommend is entitled "Songs of Horses" containing the best poems that have been written in homage of the thoroughbred. The contributions have been selected and arranged by Robert Frothingham, and published by Houghton Mifflin Company. They include poetical works of Longfellow, Bret Harte, Kipling, Browning, Holmes and others of equal fame.



Gerald Beaumont.

The fact that human genius has not turned more frequently and resolutely to the horse for inspiration presents a peculiar literary phenomenon. The ancients regarded the horse as of divine origin and attempted to express kinship by the creation of the Centaur. No myth was complete without its equine heroes. Neptune rode over the sea in a chariot drawn by steeds with golden manes and brazen hoofs. Phoebus drove the golden chariot of the sun with three white horses. Pegasus to this day symbolizes the spirit of the poet. Primitive man got his greatest thrill when he first mounted the horse and traveled faster than human agency could carry him.

But always ahead of fable and fancy there has moved the actual thoroughbred, and it is so to this day. The horse has slaved for man in peace and died for him in war, and the writer doesn't live who

can do justice to the thoroughbred. To quote Bret Harte:

"I love my God the first of all,

Then Him that perished on the cross,
And next my wife, and then I fall

Down on my knees and love the horse."

One can almost understand how the Emperor Caligula came to appoint his favorite horse Incitatus a Roman consul. No doubt the horse was more intelligent than the dissipated dandies of the Roman court. Also one can sympathize with the gentleman from Kentucky who on being shown the equestrian statue of George Washington said: "Ah, yes—and what was the breeding of the horse?"

There is a pretty legend connected with the ancestry of the racehorse. It appears that during the time of Mohammed his followers while crossing the desert suffered greatly from the lack of water. Finally a

river was sighted, and immediately all the horses were turned loose. Too late it was seen that a deep gully lay between the river and the onrushing animals. It seemed impossible to save a single horse. Nevertheless Mahommed ordered his chiefs to call to their favorite steeds. This was done and five royal mares left the stampede and returned to their masters. These faithful animals, the only ones saved, were mated subsequently to the wild stallions of the desert, and thus the pure Arab stock was perpetuated.

Volumes have been written on the history of the thoroughbred, and the half has not been told. What fictional characters can match the glory of Eclipse, Matchem and Herod, the three great sires to whom all racehorses, worthy the name, trace their pedigree? What fictional characters could do more than has been accomplished by Diomed, Lexington, Longfellow, Ten Broeck, Salvator, Domino, Hamburg and on down the line to Man o' War and the present day gallant campaigner, Exterminator, known to the racing world by the affectionate sobriquet of 'Old Slim'?"

Surely no author, dipping his quill into the well of fancy, could picture a more dramatic struggle than that which transpired on the old Long Island course, May 27, 1823, when 100,000 persons gathered to see the celebrated "Eclipse against the world" race. And Eclipse kept the faith, defeating the Southern horse, Sir Henry, in a desperate struggle that required three four-mile heats before the victor was determined.

The modern racetrack is a world to itself, offering every variety of comedy, pathos, drama and tragedy. The writer may make his own selection of theme. He will find plenty of evil if he looks for it: plenty of sordidness, commercialism and vice. But if he studies the heart of the thoroughbred he will have room in his own for nothing but admiration. Whatever may be said about the pernicious influence of racetrack gambling, the thoroughbred itself represents only the most noble qualities. I hold with that gallant British nobleman and patron of sport who wrote:

Soft lies the turf on those who find their rest
Beneath our common mother's ample breast,
Unstained by meanness, avarice or pride;
They never cheated and they never lied.
They ne'er intrigued a rival to displace;
They ran but never bet upon the race—
Content with harmless sport and simple food,
Boundless in faith and love and gratitude.
Happy the man, if there be any such,
Of whom his epitaph can say as much.

What do YOU know about the discovery of America?

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Publishers, Boston

Authors' Works and Ways

The Brick Row Book Shop, Inc., of New York, for several years dealers in rare books, first editions, manuscripts, etc., now announces its plans for entering the publishing field this winter. Its style is Edmond Byrne Hackett: The Brick Row Book Shop, Inc., this imprint having historic precedent in the arrangement under which Henry Frowde published for the Oxford University Press, as does Humphrey Milford for the same body to-day.

Robert H. Dodd announces the publication on December 15, of Volume Four of the "Iconography of Manhattan Island," by I. N. Phelps Stokes. The volume, which consists of a chronology from the sixth century A. D. to 1776, has been twelve years in preparation.

Harry L. Foster, author of "The Adventures of a Tropical Tramp," who recently returned from the Far East, has finished a second book which Dodd, Mead and Company will publish next spring under the title, "A Beachcomber in the Orient."

In his South American adventures Mr. Foster drifted along the Andes and down the Amazon without a cent in his pocket, but was fortunate enough to find a job whenever he needed one. In his new book, he set out for the East with sufficient funds but the luck which had favored him in his previous travels had deserted him. A fellow traveler ran away with his money and his clothes, leaving Mr. Foster to hike overland through the jungles of Indo-China and Siam, and to ride freight cars through the Malay States to Singapore, where he found his only employment as pianist in Kwong Bee's waterfront resort.

On November 11 last Anna Katharine Green celebrated her 76th birthday. Since the publication of "The Leavenworth Case" in 1878 she continued to write mystery story after mystery story, and now Dodd, Mead and Company announce her new book, "The Step on the Stair," which they will publish some time in January.